

### **NESSC Council Meetings**

The Consortium has convened the regional NESSC Council twice this past year on August 3 and October 16. The Council is composed of the commissioner of education, the NESSC state lead from the department of education, a state board member, state legislator, governor's representative, and prominent business leader from each state, as well as an at-large member selected by the states. Three regional at-large members include the president of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the president of the New England Board of Higher Education, and the executive director of New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

By all accounts, the first two Council meetings went extremely well. On August 3, the NESSC state leads provided the Council with an overview of the Consortium's vision, mission, and strategic goals, and a vote was taken to endorse the Consortium's vision statement. Two tools—*Global Best Practices in Context* and *High Leverage Policy*—were presented, and the day concluded with roundtable discussions on how the Council could support and advance the Consortium's work. The second Council meeting largely focused on two objectives: revising the NESSC Declaration of Commitment, and reviewing the NESSC Theory of Action and Logic Model. The day was filled with robust conversation and every Council member was actively engaged in refining the Consortium's strategies and general action plan. Energy seemed high, and several Council members made plans to continue meeting and planning in their states.

### **Spring 2010 Regional Conference**

During the NESSC Working Group meeting that took place on October 29, it was decided that the Consortium would coordinate and host a regional conference in March or April 2010. The conference, which will most likely take place in southern New Hampshire, will attract secondary school teams—superintendents, principals, teachers—from across New England to share best practices and learn about the Consortium and its work. The conference is still in the early planning stages and more information will be available as the project progresses.

### **Connecticut Joins the Consortium**

One of the most important decisions made during the October 16 NESSC Council meeting was a vote to invite Connecticut to join the Consortium. With the support of the Consortium's state commissioners and funding partners, the invitation was accepted and unanimously supported by the NESSC Council. The addition of Connecticut signals a major step forward for the Consortium. Not only does Connecticut's involvement further strengthen the regional coherence and common purpose of our collective secondary transformation work, but it extends the Consortium's reach to more than 175,000 high schools students, roughly a third of whom are minorities. The Consortium extends a hearty welcome to Connecticut and looks forward to working closely with its commissioner, state leaders, and educators going forward.

### **NESSC Goal-Specific Working Groups**

As an extension of the Consortium's strategic goal of bringing greater commonality, coherence, and common purpose to the promotion of secondary transformation and best practices across the New England region, the Consortium has been convening critical department of education leaders from its four founding member states. In addition to the NESSC Council and Working Group, the Consortium has also been working with department of education data teams and communication directors, as well as with other state leaders, to begin conversations about collaborative approaches to our regional work. The state data teams are developing common regional metrics for measuring progress made toward achieving Consortium goals. The long-range ambition of the project, however, is to potentially institutionalize these metrics to foster greater comparability in educational outcomes across New England. The communications team has met several times since last spring. Discussions have focused on common regional messaging and communications strategies, as well as effective use of online tools and social media to enhance information exchange within and across states. In the future, we hope to extend these goal-specific working groups to include department of education staff overseeing standards and assessment.

## New NESSC Website Launch in 2010

The Consortium has contracted with Liberty Concepts in Boston to design and build a new cutting-edge website that will act as a virtual hub for our regional work. Liberty is a highly respected website development and online strategy firm that has a strong portfolio of clients from across New England and the country. Unlike many marketing firms and website developers, Liberty specializes in online campaigns and social-change advocacy, and they have developed a suite of powerful applications for raising awareness, engaging constituencies, and mobilizing people around a common mission. Although Liberty works with political clients, they are aware and highly supportive of the fact that the Consortium is a nonpartisan organization committed to the students of New England, not any particular political ideology. We encourage you to check out their portfolio of work. The new website, along with a redesigned logo, will be launched in late January 2010. The Great Schools Partnership will work with each member state to ensure that their secondary-transformation work will be prominently profiled on the new website.

## Update on NESSC Tools

As part of its Phase I work plan, the Consortium has developed drafts of two resources: *Global Best Practices in Context: An Internationally Benchmarked Self-Assessment Tool for Secondary Learning* and *High Leverage Policy: Transforming Secondary Schooling in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont*. So far, these tools have received favorable, even enthusiastic, responses from educators in the field. The Great Schools Partnership has reached out to several people with a strong background in international benchmarking, and three of the world's top experts have agreed to review and possibly even endorse the tool: Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University; Andreas Schleicher, Head of the Indicators and Analysis Division at the Directorate for Education in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; and Vivien Stewart, Vice President for Education at the Asia Society. The plan is to finalize these tools for publication in February 2010, which will give high schools time to incorporate them into their school-improvement plans for the coming year.

### Global Best Practices in Context

#### An Internationally Benchmarked Self-Assessment Tool for Secondary Learning

*Global Best Practices in Context* is an attempt to bridge the divide between international best-practice research and the practical application of proven strategies in schools. The tool distills some common characteristics of high-performing school systems across the globe, and provides schools with a practical, step-by-step process they can use to assess their relative performance in key areas and strategically shape their improvement plans going forward. This resource is a first step toward describing, in detail, what the public high schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century could look like, what strategies they could consider, and what performance indicators they should be paying attention to. High-quality educational research on high-performing schools is being produced every day and it's available to anyone with the time to track it down. But the problem, of course, is that much of this research is so widely dispersed, overly technical, and often difficult to find that its practical utility to the busy educator is significantly diminished. Our hope is that, when completed, *Global Best Practices in Context* will not only make some of this important research more accessible and useful to our schools and educators, but that it will also help translate this important knowledge into on-the-ground actions that will improve educational achievement, attainment, and outcomes for the students of New England.

### High Leverage Policy

#### Transforming Secondary Schooling in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont

Created by a team of researchers from the Center for Education Policy Analysis at the University of Connecticut, *High Leverage Policy* is a detailed exploration of educational policy from rationale to creation to implementation. By taking into account the entire "ecosystem" in which policy is formed, written, and implemented, *High Leverage Policy* provides school administrators, educators, and policy makers with a comprehensive framework they can use to identify and develop effective, high-leverage policies in their states, districts, and schools. Using a common definition of high-leverage policy—i.e., policies that not only increase educational achievement, attainment, and equity for all students, but that also generate positive change throughout the educational system—the Consortium's high-leverage policy framework is a first step toward a more holistic view of educational policy, leading the way for more thoughtful and sustainable guidelines for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The report also presents four case studies of high-leverage policies in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. In the near future, a fifth case study, of Connecticut, will be included.